2020 Welcoming Schools Report Webinar

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Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
Diverse coalition of more than 60 member organizations that represents the needs of immigrants, migrants, refugees and other new Americans living in Pennsylvania

PICC seeks to advance immigrants’ rights and promote their full integration into society by advocating for fair policies that welcome and sustain immigrants.

PICC brings together community groups, social and legal service providers, mutual assistance associations, unions, faith communities, immigrant leaders, and concerned individuals.
**WELCOMING SCHOOLS TIMELINE**

**FALL 2016, TRUMP ELECTED**
PICC was flooded with questions from parents and teachers across PA, asking whether it was safe to send their children to school and what schools could do to protect students.

**SUMMER 2016, PICC’S SUMMER YOUTH CONVENCING**
Youth expressed their fear of ICE raids in the community and lack of knowledge of what to do if immigration came to their homes, neighborhoods, or schools, but also a desire to improve schools for ALL families.

**MAY 2017, WELCOMING SCHOOLS TOOLKIT PUBLISHED**
PICC and the Stephen and Sandra Sheller Center for Social Justice at Temple University Beasley School of Law created the toolkit to ensure that all students—regardless of their immigration status—are welcome, safe, and protected in the school environment.

**FALL 2018, READING SD PASSED A RESOLUTION**
The community worked together with the support of the Welcoming Schools Toolkit example resolutions to make their school more welcoming to ALL students.

**SPRING 2019, PICC PUBLISHED THE 2019 WELCOMING SCHOOLS REPORT**
This report provides a snapshot of the experiences of immigrant parents and students, and a basis for policy and practice recommendations for PA school districts and advocates.

**FALL 2018, PICC SOUGHT TO TAKE THE TOOLKIT EVEN FURTHER**
Inspired by the testimonies and data collected in the Toolkit, PICC led workshops and developed a questionnaire to deepen our understanding of the experiences of immigrant students and parents in PA schools.
Helpful Documents

Pennsylvania Immigration & Citizenship Coalition

Welcoming Schools Report Summary

The Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) conducted a questionnaire in 2020 to better understand the educational experience of immigrant, refugee, and unaccompanied students and their parents across Pennsylvania. PICC staff conducted 17 collaborative workshops with students, parents, and partner organizations which provided information based on their specific needs. These sessions were voluntary, anonymous, and completed by 105 students and 15 parents for a total of 117 responses.

Safe and Welcoming Environment

Safety was a significant concern for students, with 67% of students surveyed indicating they do not feel safe while at school. One student wrote in “I'm not safe” even though it was a closed response question. Another third of students expressed concerns about the possibility of ICE presence at schools, while about half of the students indicated that the school had communicated what to do if ICE were to come to their school.

Schools can make students feel safer by:
- Encouraging and celebrating diversity
- Creating and supporting immigrant led initiatives (clubs, groups, seminars, etc.)
- Providing quality language access support
- Setting policies in place around ICE enforcement, and clearly communicating to staff and community
- Teachers and staff displaying compassion, support, and fostering empowerment

Language Access

The 2019 responses from the 2018 findings that language access is an important condition for students and parents feeling welcomed and supported by their schools. The majority – 84% – of students’ first languages were not English, with 45% preferring to speak or read in a language other than English. 76% of students indicated they received communications in their preferred language for outreach. Students also indicated that language access was an important factor in feeling safe and welcomed at school and supported their ability to participate. This is highlighted by student responses about safety, maintaining multiple languages spoken and bilingual staff as empowering factors.

Welcoming Schools Check-Up

Is your school district a Welcoming Schools District?

Use this checklist as a guide in creating more welcoming schools for every student and parent, regardless of their immigration status.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

☑ Does your school provide accessible, professional interpreters?
☑ What does your school do to ensure that parents and students know how to access interpretation?
☑ Are all school staff trained in how to utilize interpretation services?
☐ Does your school order school materials and resources, including the websites, in all preferred languages?
☑ How does your school ensure that families are getting materials in their preferred language?
☐ How does your school know what languages students and parents prefer? Do you ask at registration?
☐ How are you supporting English Language Learners (ELL)?
☐ Are parents and students who do not speak English able to fully participate in programming?

TEACHER AND SCHOOL STAFF DEVELOPMENT

☐ Are all school staff participating in multicultural sensitivity and anti-racism professional development trainings?
☐ How are staff members demonstrating an awareness of working with immigrant and ELL communities?
☐ Do teachers and staff receive training to address bullying, particularly if it is based on student identity?
☐ Does your school pay teachers and staff at a wage where they can excel in their work?

CREATING A SAFE AND WELCOMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

☐ Has your school enacted a Welcoming Schools Resolution and trained all staff on the policy?
☐ Does your school hire staff that reflect the community served, including EOC and bilingual staff?
☐ Does your school provide information about where families can obtain quality immigration legal services?
☐ Does your school host events offering immigration specific information, such as Know Your Rights trainings or legal screenings?
☐ Does your school provide information about immigration resources held outside of the school?
☑ Does your school clearly communicate these resources so that families know exactly where to find them?

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

☐ How are immigrant and refugee students supported in transitioning to a new school and county, beyond ESL class?
☐ How is your school preparing students of all backgrounds for college or work after graduation?
☐ Can students who are interested in taking AP or honors courses find support in doing so?
☐ How does your school ensure ELL students succeed academically while they are learning English?

Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
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Our 2019-2020 Partners

- ACLAMO
- African Family Health Organization (AFAHO)
- Aquinas Center
- Casa San Jose
- Centro de Apoyo Comunitario
- Project Libertad Norristown
- HIAS Philadelphia
- Project Libertad Phoenixville
- Make the Road Reading
- Mural Arts Philadelphia Southeast by Southeast Storefront
- Nationalities Services Center (NSC)
- Puentes de Salud- Lanzando Lideres High School Program
- UNIDAD Norristown Area High School
Purpose - Why we did this questionnaire

Gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of immigrant students.

Built upon the Welcoming Schools Toolkit.

Provide PICC, schools, educators with guidance.
Community Participatory Approach

- Questionnaire distributed at information sessions and workshops.
  - Access to College
  - Welcoming Schools Campaign
  - Know Your Rights in Schools
- Used a community based participatory approach.
- Led 17 sessions across the state.
- Gathered 105 student and 12 parent questionnaire responses
This map shows the areas where schools that were represented from student and parent responses. The schools mentioned by youth responses are represented by star icons, and schools stated from parent responses are represented by book icons.

30 different schools were represented by respondents.
Out of 500 school districts within Pennsylvania, only 6 districts have Welcoming School policies in place:

- Allentown
- Reading City
- Pittsburgh City
- Upper Darby
- Havertown
- Centennial

There are still significant gaps regarding:

- Students feelings of safety
- Students concerns on ICE
- Adequate language/academic access
- staff/leadership development
- Wider understanding of what welcoming environments look and feel like
Results & Recommendations

Our results and recommendations fit into four categories:

- Creating a Safe and Welcoming Environment
- Language Access
- Teacher and Staff Development
- Academic support
Creating a Safe and Welcoming Environment
Not ALL Students Feel Safe at School

71 (67%) students stated that they DO NOT FEEL SAFE at school.

8 students said they were bullied based on their identity as an immigrant/child of immigrants.

Only 21% of students felt teachers and school staff provided support when they were bullied.
Students Concerned About ICE at School

29% of all students worry about ICE coming to their schools.

This concern was shared by students of all immigration statuses:
- Did not identify their status – 16%
- U.S. Citizen – 51%
- Undocumented – 22%
- Naturalized Citizen – 1

“Yes, it's sad to see this things. And worse to hear people stories of ICE taking them”
- Student
“I feel safe when I'm with people, but sometimes when I'm in the hallway by myself when I get scared due to the popularity of school shootings recently”

“I don't feel safe nowhere, the world is so messed up now that you don’t know what can happen”

“I feel unsafe because the school I go to is predominantly white. So I always feel attached by looks and certain things said.”

“(Feel unsafe) Because I have no American friends school”

“I feel safe because there are people who speak the same language that I do”

“I feel safe because we have a police and security guard”

“I feel safe in my school. We have a lot of diversity and staff that helps you out.”

“The school is pretty diverse and not a lot of bullying or discrimination takes place”
Recommendations: Safe and Welcoming Environment

- Language access policies
- Policies governing how schools will interact with ICE
- Need to train all staff and ensure students and parents are aware of all policies
- Create more welcoming spaces for all students by updating curriculum and school programs to focus on diversity, cultural humility, and anti-racism
- Hold immigrant specific events, create clubs, classes, and support groups that connect school leadership with students, and their families.
- Communicate any measures being taken to protect students from mass shootings, anti-immigrant sentiment, racism/bigotry, and bullying
Students and parents offered many specific suggestions on how to create safe and welcoming schools

- Schools should create a variety of support systems for immigrant and newcomer students
- Hiring bilingual staff
- Treat members with respect, empathy, compassion
- Provide quality language access through translators, interpreters, resources

- Keep an open and accessible line of communication across email, texts, phone calls, social media to keep families up to date on students’ well-being, and school environment
- Provide access for involvement for surrounding community
Language Access
Language Access is Critical for Student Growth

78% of students are receiving communications and resources in their preferred language.

English was listed as major theme that prevented students from participating in classes at their academic level.

53% of students stated that their school is clearly presenting material online in their preferred language.

Providing language services and better access was one of most mentioned way schools could make students and parents feel safe and welcomed at school.
Legal Requirements

Schools are required to ensure all students have equal access to educational resources.

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) and Section 4.26 of the Pennsylvania School Code all require that public schools provide language assistance, interpretation and translation for students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and English Language Learners (ELL).
Language Access Story
“Yes, because we practice. Sometimes I have trouble with history because I don't understand what they are trying to say. Its suffocating” (Student Response)

“I feel strange because I cannot understand the meetings or information, or the meetings about education” (Parent response)

“I only respond to online surveys because they are in Spanish” (Parent Response)

“People say things to us because we speak Spanish” (Student Response)

“The school has bilingual teachers” (Student Response)

“I feel safe because there are people who speak the same language that I do” (Student Response)
Recommendations: Language Access

- Children are not interpreters.
- All documents and website must be professionally translated.
- Provide professional, in person interpretation during school activities.
- Schools **must** have a policy and process in place for accessing interpretation services.
- Students should have access to high quality programs that support their English acquisition.
- Schools should have a method to track language preference.
- Hire and retain bilingual teachers, staff, and counsellors.
Teacher and Staff Development
Teacher and Staff Development is Essential

What made students feel safe and welcome in school? Teachers and staff.

Some students specified that they felt particularly safe when teachers and school staff were explicitly anti-racist and welcoming to students of differing cultural backgrounds.

13% of students said that they did not feel that teachers or school staff supported them when they were bullied.

47% of students were unaware of any immigrant-specific resources offered by their school. 28% of youth were unsure how to access said resources.
“Some teachers are rude and disrespectful”

“They don't really expose students to other cultures”

“I feel like when I was being 'bullied' I did not have support. I didn't have support because I didn't talk/tell about what happened”

“(Bullying) It was shrugged off or "a joke"

“Yes, the teacher I had at the time stood up for me and had called the students mother and talked with the principal about it.”

“Everyone is kind and the staff are ready to willingly support anyone who needs help”
Recommendations: Teacher and Staff Development

- All school staff should receive professional development training and resources about how to support immigrant, migrant, and refugee students.
- School districts should hire more staff that reflect the community served, including more people of color and bilingual staff.
- School staff should participate in regular cultural sensitivity and anti-racism trainings.
- Teachers need the skills to *facilitate conversations* on contentious issues such as race, culture, immigration policy, and bullying.
- It is important for teachers and staff to advocate on behalf of students.
- Create and support resources, programming, clubs, and groups for immigrant students and families.
Academic Support
Students are Seeking More Academic Support

Only 37% of students felt school was preparing them for work or college, with 27% believing they were prepared for 4 year college.

20% of the students who were not in AP classes expressed desire to enroll.

For English Learner Students 15% felt they were not being challenged due to their lack of English proficiency, and only 21% felt they had access to all academic programs at school.

The most requested resource was information about how to attend college as an undocumented student.
“I do (feel work is appropriate) but I feel sometimes teachers and classes don't talk to each other to understand and that they (students) have other responsibilities”

“I feel like we get stressed with a lot of homework where we don't have a lot of free time.”

“The school helps you feel comfortable with the classes”

“Yes the work is challenging yet appropriate for my class rigor and grade level”

“Yes, it challenges me in a way I can grow from it”
Recommendations: Academic Support

● Ensure that students have the resources they need to succeed in school.
  ○ Language resources, work and college preparation support, extra academic support, information about how to participate in higher level courses, counselors, and mental health access.

● Teachers and staff must have sufficient cultural awareness and understanding of language proficiency to provide the extra support that immigrant students may need in the classroom.
  ○ Understanding cultural differences, differences in formal education systems, and how to support English language acquisition.

● Schools must ensure English Learner students are given information about academic programs, and provided with support to participate

● Hire and retain bilingual staff in all areas of academic programming
What About School Funding?

Our schools need adequate funding to provide needed services for immigrant and refugee students and proper staff training.

Pennsylvania ranks 46th in the country in the state’s share of funding for public schools. Only about 38% of the costs of public education is covered by the state.

Chronic underfunding of PA schools means:
- 40% of districts are increasing class sizes
- 36% of districts are reducing or furloughing staff
- 30% of districts are cutting programs and services

Get Involved! PA Schools Work Campaign, www.paschoolswork.org
Taking the Next Step
What You Can Do

Work with your school to create more welcoming policies and practices.

Pass resolutions in your school district.

Sign up to host educational community sessions at your school or organization. We will be hosting sessions all year long and distributing the questionnaire from February 2021 to April 2021.

Email us at education@paimmigrant.org and fill out this form.
Advocacy Approaches

Local Advocacy:
- Ask your local school board to pass Welcoming Schools Resolutions
- Make sure your schools are implementing welcoming policies and follow through (see recommendations on Welcoming Schools Report)
- Give trainings during school district staff professional development days

Statewide Advocacy:
- Educate your elected officials about the needs of immigrant and refugee students and the campaign for school fair funding

What approaches do you have in mind?
Welcoming Schools Toolkit & Materials

Welcoming Schools Report Summary: Give to your school administration and school board to help make the argument for more welcoming policies.

Welcoming Schools Check Up: Find out how welcoming your school is and what more you can do to support immigrant and refugee students!

Welcoming Schools Toolkit: Comprehensive guide on welcoming school policies.

All materials at: http://paimmigrant.org/
Thank You!

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Do you want to schedule a presentation or have questions about Education Justice? please contact Chris Cannito at education@paimmigrant.org